Seeking youthful inspiration on day of climate action

The Toronto Star

March 19, 2021 Friday

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Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. A16

Length: 485 words

Byline: Alan Silverman Contributor

Body

March 19 has been declared a day of global climate action. Following the lead of the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, many Toronto youth - under the banner of Fridays for Future - are calling on our governments to forcefully address the climate emergency. The theme is "no more empty promises."

I am a senior, and I am deeply worried for the future of my four grandchildren. I am concerned and angry to find out that Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions have gone up in the last year, that Doug Ford's attempt to destroy several precious wetland areas are part of a Trump-like disdain for the environment, and that the new federal Liberal climate action plan is very inadequate.

The youth are pleading with governments to take the radical action that is needed to avoid a climate catastrophe. A few weeks ago, the UN released its initial assessment on the 2030 climate action targets submitted by 78 countries. These plans will likely lead to a less than 1 per cent reduction in emissions. And Canada did not even submit its report by the required deadline. We are in trouble!

Being an older person, I have been particularly anxious about the pandemic we are living through. Seniors have suffered the highest number of COVID-related deaths, and look at the catastrophe that has occurred in our long-term-care homes. I ask myself, is there a link between our current health disasters and the climate crisis? Science is telling us that disregard for the environment provides more and more opportunities for pandemics to develop. Is this what my grandkids have to look forward to?

The youth are telling us that it cannot be business as usual. The federal government and Toronto City Hall have both declared that we are in a climate emergency. But are these governments acting as if we are in an emergency? Our whole economy is based on fossil fuels - one of the main sources of the climate crisis - so our whole economy needs to be restructured.

Let us not fool ourselves - we live in a petrostate. No Canadian government has yet shown the courage to confront the fossil fuel industry and help Canadians to make the necessary deep changes.

The youth are telling us that this pandemic has left many Canadians behind. Seniors, workers on the front lines, and racialized and Indigenous communities have disproportionately suffered.

In our efforts to bring the climate crisis under control, we must ensure that social and economic justice guide us in these efforts.

As a senior it gives me inspiration to see so many young people involved. Many years of experience have shown me that in the face of a difficult situation, there is hope in collective action. And that is why I have joined with other seniors in Seniors for Climate Action Now! (SCAN!) to support and stand with the younger generation. New generations deserve the solidarity of older ones.

Alan Silverman is a longtime teacher, social justice activist and jazz fanatic.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: TTA

Subject: CLIMATE ACTION (92%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (90%); CLIMATE CHANGE (89%); EMISSIONS (89%); PUBLIC HEALTH (88%); EPIDEMICS (87%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (79%); SOCIAL JUSTICE (78%); SOCIETY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE & LIFESTYLE (78%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (77%); SENIOR HOUSING (76%); GREENHOUSE GASES (75%); POLLUTION MONITORING, PREVENTION & REMEDIATION (75%); WETLANDS (73%); DEATH & DYING (72%); GRANDCHILDREN (71%); UNITED NATIONS (68%); DEATH RATES (67%); COVID CORONAVIRUS (66%); INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (64%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%)

Industry: EMISSIONS (89%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (89%); FOSSIL FUELS (61%)

Person: GRETA THUNBERG (79%)

Geographic: TORONTO, ON, CANADA (93%); ONTARIO, CANADA (88%); CANADA (94%)

Load-Date: March 26, 2021

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